

Academic clears the air on Malay-Arabic calligraphy

KUALA LUMPUR: Tracing, copying the Jawi characters and adding the dots to produce khat calligraphy is all there is to the learning of the art form at school.

Prof Dr S. Vijayaletchumy, lecturer in language learning and acquisition at the Department of Malay Language at Universiti Putra Malaysia, said the subject will only be taught four times a year for 10 minutes each time as support material for the Bahasa Melayu syllabus.

Vijayaletchumy, who sat on the panel that drafted the curriculum, said only "five or six" Jawi characters will be introduced.

She noted that there had been some confusion over the difference between Jawi and khat.

"Jawi is a form of writing used for official purposes, while khat is a decorative art form using flowing cursive letterings," she pointed out.

She was commenting on the outcry over the proposal to introduce khat in the Bahasa Melayu syllabus for Year Four pupils, including those in national-type Chinese and Tamil primary schools, from next year.

She said the Education Ministry is incorporating khat writing in the syllabus because it is part of the Malay heritage and it has aesthetic value.

Vijayaletchumy assured parents that the introduction of khat does not have anything to do with Islamic learning because it is merely an art form, just like Chinese calligraphy.

She explained that there are five key areas in the teaching and learning of Bahasa Melayu, namely listening and speaking, reading, writing as well as grammar and vocabulary skills.

"The khat lessons incorporate aesthetics in



Muhammad Anis Ab Ghani, 40, of SK Balik Pulau, Penang, shows how khat is done. — **BBXPIX**

writing and will not be a criterion in assessing a student's achievements," she added.

She said the lessons will be conducted in a relaxed manner, just like any other additional activity.

"This is also a psycho-motor (relating to conscious mental activity) assessment given that khat requires pupils to extend writing to the left, right, bottom and so forth," she said.

She added it can be fun for students since they will be no pressure to pass a test.

Vijayaletchumy noted the introduction of khat will not require more teachers, and parents need not have to worry about costs because all tools will be allocated by the government.

The panel that drafted the curriculum comprised 30 linguists, including teachers from Chinese and Tamil national-type schools.